

Occasional Notes
from the Cambridge Historical Commission
Miss Keller and Miss Sullivan in Cambridge

A young documentary filmmaker asked us in which house on Dana Street Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan had lived. He believed it was before 1900; we did find the women in the City Directories, but not at first on Dana.

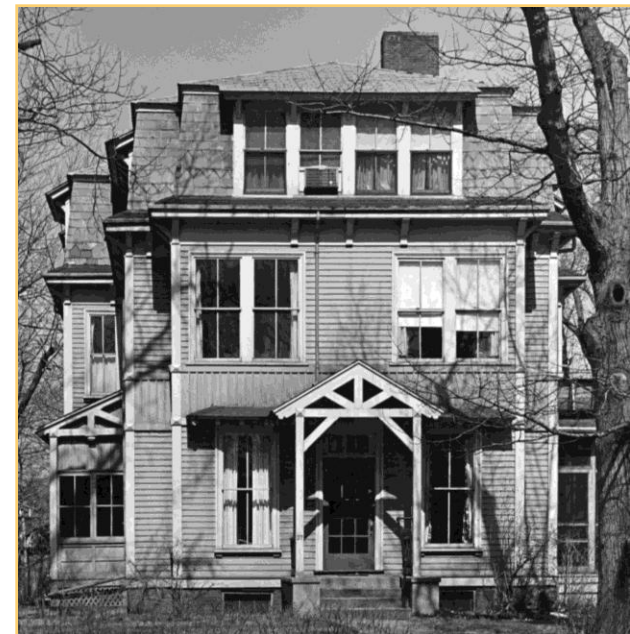


The Cambridge School for Young Ladies.
Cambridge: The Harvard Bridge Souvenir.
Cambridge Tribune. June 1890.
Demolished, date unknown.

of it . . . without any architect.” [Ethel F. Fisk, ed. *The Letters of John Fisk* (1940). Letter written 30 April 1877] In 1892, the *Cambridge Chronicle* reported: “Mr. Arthur Gilman has taken Mr. William D. Howells’ house . . . on a four years’ lease,” as a boarding house for the young ladies at the Cambridge School and the Annex.

In 1896 and 1897, Helen Keller was a student at Arthur Gilman’s Cambridge School for Young Ladies, preparing for the Harvard Annex (later called Radcliffe College), which Mr. Gilman had helped to found.

In 1897, Annie Sullivan was listed in the City Directory as a teacher at 79 Brattle Street (the Cambridge School) and boarding at 37 Concord Avenue. No. 37 had been built in 1872-1873 for the novelist and editor William Dean Howells and his wife, Elinor Mead Howells. Mrs. Howells, from an artistic family, had designed the house herself and “superintended the building



37 Concord Avenue, 1968. B. Orr photo.
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Helen was then too young to have her own directory entry, but we know she was living at no. 37 with her teacher: in a letter to Mr. Gilman dated 11 October 1896, she wrote: “I need not tell you that my home-life is full of brightness. You must have seen Friday evening that Love reigns supreme at Howells house.” [Richard Harritty and Ralph G. Martin. *The Three Lives of Helen Keller* (1962)]

In December 1897, Helen left the Cambridge School, and she and Annie moved to Wrentham, where Helen continued her studies with private tutors.



14 Coolidge Avenue/24 Coolidge Hill Road. *Courtesy of Episcopal Divinity School.* **PRIVATE HOME**

In 1900, Helen Keller entered Radcliffe College. In 1901 and 1902, the two women lived at 14 Coolidge Avenue/24 Coolidge Hill Road, then on the outskirts of town. Helen [wrote to a friend]:

“At college, one sees from the window almost nothing but long streets, buildings, and students . . .; out here, one sees trees and fields and at a short distance the winding Charles River.” Annie had much pleasure in furnishing the house, which had two bedrooms, a tiny parlor, a dining room and a study for Helen, as well as a room for Bridget, their housekeeper.

Joseph P. Lash. *Helen and Teacher* (1997)



The next edition of the directory, 1904, showed them residing at 73 Dana Street, a handsome apartment building designed to resemble a large house. Helen graduated from Radcliffe that year, and the women returned to Wrentham.

73 Dana Street, 1967-1968. *B. Orr photo.*
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